

BUILD SKILLS

Walt Whitman's Poetry

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Many poets write poems that have a fixed meter and line length. Others write **free verse**, or poetry that has an irregular meter and line length. One goal of free verse is to imitate the flow of everyday speech. Thus, Whitman varies his rhythms and line lengths to fit his message:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself . . .

Whitman did not invent free verse, but he was the first American poet to use it. It proved to be the perfect form to let him express himself without formal restraints.

Along with his use of free verse, Whitman's **diction**—word choice and arrangement—also plays a key role in his voice. Whitman's diction is characterized by the use of two main techniques:

- The use of catalogs, or long lists
- The use of **parallelism**—the repetition of phrases or sentences with similar structures or meanings.

READING STRATEGY

You can **infer a poet's attitude** toward a subject by looking at his or her choice of words and details. Consider this passage from Whitman's "Song of Myself":

I jump from the crossbeams and seize the clover and timothy,
And roll head over heels . . .

Use the following chart to note key words and images in Whitman's poems and to identify the attitude each shows.

Words, Details, Images	Poet's Attitude

